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AUTHOR Bateman, David F.
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need for transitional services for students with behavior problems. "Seriously emotionally disturbed" is an educational term related primarily to learning problems exhibited by students as a consequence of their emotional or behavioral problems. Follow-up studies of students with emotional and behavioral disorders indicate that this population tends to drop out of school, experience a high rate of unemployment or underemployment, encounter problems with the law, and receive little assistance from community agencies upon leaving school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 requires state and local education agencies to include an individualized educational plan (IEP) for all disabled secondary school students that addresses plans for graduation as well as future needs and goals pertaining to independent adult living. A survey of secondary school teachers of students with behavior disorders in the Midwest revealed that the biggest problems in transitioning such students were related to lack of social skills, lack of self-awareness and responsibility, lack of daily functional skills, lack of support, and teaching barriers. A successful transition program must incorporate vocational preparation activities, social skills and self-awareness training, and independent living skills. Administration of a transition planning assessment and a parent transition questionnaire are helpful in preparing goals for the transition component of the IEP. Equally important is the transition specialist who coordinates services for students and their families. (Contains 17 references.) (LP)

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David F. Bateman, Ph.D.
Teacher Education Department
Shippensburg University
Shippensburg, Pennsylvania

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A SURVEY OF TRANSITION NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIOR DISORDERS IN THE MIDWEST

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March 20-23, 1996
Baltimore, Maryland

Abstract:
A survey was conducted on secondary teachers of students with behavior disorders to understand the curriculum and transition services offered to students in the Midwest.

Introduction:
Youth with emotional and behavioral disorders represent the third largest category of students with disabilities (Coleman, 1996; Wehman, 1992). However, it has been suggested the number of students in need of special services because of emotional and behavioral problems is actually larger due to an under identification in the field. The National Institute of Mental Health found approximately 12% of U.S. children need mental health services. The Council for Exceptional Children's Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders estimates half of these children need special education services. However, since implementation of P.L. 94-142, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the number served has not exceeded 1% (Coleman, 1996). This underidentification may occur because some characteristics of serious emotional disturbances, such as depression, may be overlooked in school settings. Additionally, the classification of an SED label is often seen as demeaning and derogatory. Thus, children are now identified represent those most severely impaired.

This article begins with the definition and characteristics of students identified as having an emotional and behavioral disorder. The rationale for the need to identify current post high school transition issues and challenges will then be discussed. Information will be presented with the most common problems teachers and students encounter during the transition process and their suggestions for how more appropriate services could be provided. The article will conclude with an effective transition program, based on results obtained in a survey given to teachers in the midwest.

Definition and characteristics:
Seriously emotionally disturbed is an educational term relating primarily to learning problems exhibited by students as a consequence of their emotional/behavioral characteristics. Such characteristics occur over a long period of time and to a marked degree. They may include an inability to learn that is not

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the effect of intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to establish or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with others; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Bullis & Ross, 1990; Coleman, 1996; Wehman, 1992). This is a very diverse group with behaviors ranging from displays of depression to delinquent, antisocial behavior. Teachers have a great challenge in helping these students develop the confidence and skills necessary for vocational competence and adult independence.

Transition follow-up studies:
The results of follow-up studies of students with emotional and behavioral disorders show this population tends to drop out of school (Bullis, 1990; Bullis & Ross, 1990; Wagner, 1991); does not enroll in postsecondary education programs (Pullis, 1991: Bullis & Ross, 1990; Wehman, 1992); experience a high rate of unemployment or underemployment (Bullis, 1990; Bullis & Ross, 1990; Wehman, 1992); encounter problems with the law; and receive little assistance from community agencies upon leaving school (Bullis, 1990; Coleman, 1996; Pullis, 1991; Simpson, 1996).

Dropping out of school is often the result of poor grade performance and high absenteeism, feeling disengaged with teachers and peers, and viewing school as unimportant. In reference to the characteristics exhibited by students with emotional and behavioral disorders listed above and how these characteristics interact with the school environment, it is not surprising this group of students has the highest dropout rate of any category of disability at almost 50%. This compares to the 25-30% drop out rate of those with other disabilities (Kortering & Blackorby, 1992; Peraino, 1992; Pullis, 1991; Simpson, 1996; Wagner, 1991; Wehman, 1992). Therefore, visibility of these symptoms may be considered as red flags or warning to schools for the need for special support programs and dropout prevention activities. These specific interventions will differ from school to school as teachers and administrators take into account the particular characteristics of the school and its students. However, such programs might emphasize socialization skills, substance abuse, anger control, and self esteem issues (Peraino, 1992; Simpson, 1996; Wagner, 1992). The national goal of a 90% graduation rate by the year 2000 requires an overall improvement, but especially from those having a disability. Additionally, if we don't change our delivery of transition services, these students may not only become dropouts of school but run the risk of dropping out of the social mainstream (Kortering & Blackorby, 1992; Simpson, 1996).

Employment for students with emotional and behavioral disorders is often part-time, in low-skill jobs, and/or at poverty-level wages (D'Amico & Marder, 1991; Weber, 1996). Data from one study showed only 20% earn above minimum wage two years after graduation (Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 1992). Additionally, the employment rate for this group only ranges from 40-60%, compared to 85% of the general population (D'Amico & Marder, 1991; Pullis, 1991; Rosenberg et al, 1992). Although these overall employment percentages seem

bleak, it is important to note students who graduate appear to have a more promising future than those who dropout. For example, one study found graduates were 17 percentage points more likely to have found competitive employment than were dropouts with similar characteristics. Graduates were also 14 percentage points more likely than dropouts to have enrolled in a postsecondary school, and 27 percentage points more likely to have become engaged in work or education-related activities outside the home. Furthermore, students with disabilities who received vocational education performed better in school and at work than those who did not, had significantly lower absenteeism, and were significantly less likely to drop out of school (Wagner, 1991; Weber, 1996).

When Congress passed the 1983 amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), a federal initiative to facilitate transition of youths with disabilities to independent adult life was introduced. However, without a federal mandate to require transition services, most states did not commit to official programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-476) has made a major impact on the concept of transition planning by mandating schools take the initial responsibility for transition planning (Kansas State Board of Education, 1993). Specifically, the state uses the federal definition for "transition services" :

> ...a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation...and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation [20 U.S.C. 1401 (a)(19)].

One new component to the amendment requires the IEP must now include:

> ...a statement of the needed transition services for students beginning no later than age 16 and annually thereafter (and when determined appropriate for the individual, beginning at age 14 or younger), including, when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or linkages (or both) before the student leaves the school setting [20 U.S.C. 1401 (a)(19)].

For the first time, states and local education agencies must include on IEPs for all identified secondary school students with disabilities plans for graduation, as well as, future needs and goals pertaining to independent adult living. Through the development of an individualized transition plan, special education teachers have the opportunity to act as an advocate for students and their families during the transition process. And, although schools are not solely responsible for providing all needed services, they are responsible for ensuring needed services are provided (Rusch, Kohler, & Hughes, 1992; Simpson, 1996).

A variety of adult service programs may be available, but because each has different objectives, and often complex eligibility requirements, these services may seem

confusing to both educators and parents. Additionally, it is not uncommon for students to graduate, not to appropriate and needed services, but rather to waiting lists for those services (McDonnell et al, 1983). The effect from being on a waiting list for two to three years, without receiving any training, may result in the lose of any significant gains made by the student (Halloran & Ward, 1988). Thus, an uncertain future exists for these youth.

This assessment of the current status of those with emotional and behavioral disorders may suggest a need for the development and implementation of more appropriate services enhancing the successful transition to adult life. The key components of transition planning should include effective, high school programs preparing students to work and live in the community (functional academics, career/vocational programs, independent living skills, social skills); early access (beginning no later than junior high); case management (help assure adult services upon leaving school-based programs); family focus (active involvement of students and parents in transition planning); a range of comprehensive adult service agencies maximizing the level of independence of individuals with disabilities in work and community settings; and cooperative transition planning between schools and adult service agencies in identifying and meeting post-school needs (Bullis & Ross, 1990; Coleman, 1996; D'Amico & Marder, 1991; Halloran & Ward, 1988; Pullis, 1991). The goal of transition planning is to provide program services keeping students in school and addressing the needs of students upon leaving school.

Survey:

The focus of the survey, "A Survey of Teachers About Education and Transition Issues for Secondary Students with Behavior Disorders: Current Programs and Future Implications," was to assess the curriculum and transition programs offered in secondary programs to students with emotional and behavioral disorders. In addition, the survey collected information on what changes teachers feel would be beneficial in providing more appropriate transition services. The responses provided by teachers could serve as a step in describing types of programs needed by these students. The importance of this study lies in the fact there has been little research emphasizing the unique transition needs of adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders (Bullis, 1990; Bullis & Ross, 1990; Wehman, 1992).

Solving Problems:

Responses by teachers surveyed regarding the biggest problems in transition of students to post-school life, fell into five main categories: (1) lack of social skills; (2) lack of self-awareness/responsibility; (3) lack of daily, functional skills; (4) lack of support/personnel; and (5) teaching barriers.

The lack of social skills of students with emotional and behavioral disorders often leads to troubles with the law because of association with drugs and/or gang-related activities. Many of these students have difficulty following rules and respecting authority. Their communication and interaction skills are limited. To increase social skill and positive interactions, teachers suggest schools include social skills classes in their curriculum. They also would like to see students receiving regular

emotional and substance abuse counseling.

Students with emotional and behavioral problems often appear to have little motivation and lack goal-directed behavior. This may lead to high drop-out rates, little responsibility for behaviors, and not seeking the community support services needed. Teachers suggest students participate in goal setting and self-advocacy programs to increase self-awareness and responsibility. They also believe a well-developed transition plan be developed and regularly reviewed throughout high school.

Although daily functional skills deal with many aspects of living - shopping, employment, hygiene - most teachers surveyed felt a lack of functional skills by students with emotional and behavioral disorders effected employment the most. A high job absentee rate and a lack of following directions and getting along with others often leads to unemployment and few job placement options. Teachers suggest more on-the-job and vocational training opportunities, business-school partnerships, and integration of functional skills into the academic curriculum.

A lack of family, administrative, and community support results in less than adequate transition services for students with disabilities. Additionally, teachers often have large caseloads, endless paperwork, and not enough support personnel to meet students' needs. Teachers desire district transition coordinators, time for collaborating with parents and other professionals, and additional support from community agencies. Survey respondents clearly believe students with emotional and behavioral disorders will benefit from community resources as illustrated by responses to the statement: Estimate the percentage of students with behavior disorders who, upon graduation, you expect to need the following adult services. Results indicated that 51% need work or day placement; 23%, residential placement; 43%, supported employment; 50%, organized community leisure activities; 56%, family support services; 60%, counseling; 38%, daily living skills training; and 36%, transportation.

Another problem in the transition of students to post-school life is teaching barriers. These barriers include a lack of adequate materials and time to teach necessary skills. Many teachers and support personnel may not have the knowledge needed to contact and acquire services from community agencies. Again, a transition coordinator and/or team would be beneficial as well as ongoing teacher training. It should also be noted 90% of the teachers responding to the question, "Are you using a specific transition curriculum model?" said no. This may suggest a need for schools to consider adopting a transition model fitting their needs.

Model Transition Program:
The elements of the following transition program are based upon the results of the survey on what teachers felt was needed for students with emotional and behavior problems to lead successful, independent lives. The results corresponded greatly with the small amount of research already conducted in this area.

A successful transition program incorporates vocational preparation activities, social skills/self-awareness training and skills in independent living into an academic curriculum. First, the vocational preparation component of a successful transition program includes an introduction and orientation to careers, writing resumes, completing job applications, interviewing successfully, and learning the skills necessary to keep a job. In an effort to provide realistic training, experiences in competitive work settings are an integral part of the program. These work settings typically include retail stores, restaurants, nursing homes, automotive repair shops, and custodial work. However, the opportunities for job placements can be quite varied and may include motels, day care settings, greenhouses, lumberyards, newspaper offices, and community centers. The key in successful vocational placements is for schools and businesses to form "win-win" partnerships. In such a partnership, schools prepare students in the skills necessary to succeed, and businesses provide valuable work experiences for the students. Many positive results are expected in these vocational settings. These include an increase in confidence and self esteem, more overall responsible behavior, a sense of pride, and a possible job lead upon graduation. If inappropriate behaviors are displayed on the job, employers and/or teachers give a warning and then provide assistance with more appropriate job skills. Assistance can come in the form of employer/student consultation on unmet needs, job coaches, parent involvement, and the reexamination of abilities and interests. Removal from job site is reserved for severe, recurring behaviors.

Second, an inability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships is one of the identifying characteristics of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The absence of appropriate social skills has a tremendous influence on nearly every aspect of an individual's life - in school, on the job, in the community, and at home. Thus, this population is more likely to have problems as children and poor adjustment as adults, possibly resulting in poor mental health, dropping out of school, and juvenile delinquency. Therefore, the social skills/self-awareness component includes training in listening and basic communication skills, problem solving, conflict resolution, accepting responsibility, self-advocacy, and activities to increase self-esteem.

Social skills training must be seen as a priority - equal to that of academic instruction - in the curriculum for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. In determining which social skills to focus on, teachers should ask the question, "Will learning this new social skill make a difference in the individual's overall functioning?" In other words, learning the social skills(s) should lead to increased acceptance by others, improved school adjustment, and improved overall mental health (Moran & Jenson, 1988). Skills in the independent living component include managing finances, personal hygiene, shopping, menu planning, leisure-time skills, and finding needed resources in the community.

Third, the transition program components - vocational preparation, social skills/self-awareness, and independent living - are incorporated into an academic curriculum emphasizing functional and practical learning in the areas of English, math, and reading. To this end, initial instruction occurs in the regular classroom

or resource room with much practice occurring in community settings such as grocery stores, banks, and community service centers.

An important component in ensuring a successful transition program if implemented during a student's high school years is a clearly written transition plan stating goals and objectives for post-high school aspirations and identified services to reach these goals. Administration of a Transition Planning Assessment is helpful in preparing goals for the transition component necessary for the IEP. This assessment includes questions to be answered in cooperation with the teacher, parent, and student. Areas consist of career planning/employment options, postsecondary training, financial assistance/income support, community participation, advocacy/legal issues, leisure/recreation, transportation, self advocacy, socialization/friends, personal management, living arrangements, medical, and insurance. A Parent Transition Questionnaire is also beneficial in understanding what a student's parents understand about and desire for their child upon graduation. Such a questionnaire also provides information about what community resources and agencies the parents are aware of. Schools then can link parents with agencies so services will not be interrupted upon graduation.

This transition program suggests the need for a transition specialist who coordinates services for students and their families. They may also provide ongoing follow-up to graduates with informal counseling, referral to continuing education, social skills training, on-the-job crisis intervention, and family support.

Conclusion:

Results of the survey, "A Survey of Teachers About Education and Transition Issues for Secondary Students with Behavior Disorders: Current Programs and Future Implications," have relevance for secondary preparation and planning for the transition of students with emotional and behavioral disorders from school to adult life. Valuable information was obtained on the need for improved transition services. The components of a model transition program were identified. This program incorporates vocational preparation activities, social skills/self awareness training and skills in independent living into an academic curriculum. Additionally, the survey solicited many answers to the most common problems in the transition of students of post-school life.

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